

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 COLOMBO 001563

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS
NSC FOR DORMANDY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/18/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: GOVERNMENT LOSING MOMENTUM, CEDING
INITIATIVE IN STATIC PEACE PROCESS

REF: A. COLOMBO 1526

- [1](#)B. COLOMBO 1521
- [1](#)C. COLOMBO 1558

Classified By: AMB. JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) President Chandrika Kumaratunga's five-month-old government has so far proven unable to regain the momentum lost in the peace process since the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) walked out of negotiations with her predecessor's government in April 2003. Without encouraging signs of progress toward resuming talks, other disturbing developments, such as intra-factional LTTE violence in the East, activism by Sinhalese chauvinists, and the President's increasing preoccupation with her uncertain political future, are fueling a popular impression that the nineteen-month-long ceasefire is in jeopardy. Kumaratunga must mobilize public support for peace and forestall chauvinist efforts against a political resolution to the conflict. The U.S. can assist in several ways, including by galvanizing opinion in the international community, urging support among contacts in the Tamil diaspora in the U.S., and highlighting the benefits of peace in our programs. That said, the real impetus to reinvigorate the stalled peace process--and the political will to carry it through--obviously has to come from Kumaratunga herself. If she doesn't act--and act quickly--she risks ceding the initiative to other, more decisive players, like the LTTE and the chauvinist Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), whose agendas and aims differ radically and unhelpfully from her own. End summary.

GOVERNMENT YIELDS INITIATIVE;
PEACE PROCESS LOSES MOMENTUM

[1](#)2. (C) Since winning the election in April with a firm commitment to re-energize the stalled peace process, President Chandrika Kumaratunga has so far proven unable to mobilize support within her own government--let alone the general public--on a negotiating stance from which to resume talks, suspended since April 2003, with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Instead, much of the time and energy she has expended in the five months of her administration seem aimed at shoring up her own position as leader of a fractious coalition government, the largest partner of which is the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), whose members' radical left-wing, pro-nationalist politics are largely out of sync with the President's more moderate Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). In particular, the JVP's vociferous opposition to re-opening negotiations based on discussion of the LTTE's proposed interim administration for the north and east has complicated progress toward resuming dialogue. While the President has often reiterated her willingness to restart talks with the Tigers, conflicting statements on important issues, including the peace process, issued by members of her Cabinet undercut those commitments, contributing to an impression of disarray within the government and furnishing the Tigers an easy pretext for continued stonewalling. With her own political survival dependent on maintaining the precarious coalition, the President seems unwilling to rock her shaky ship of state by pressing for consensus on reopening negotiations.

[1](#)3. (C) Even the Norwegian facilitators agree the peace process needs reinvigoration. The September 14-17 visit of Special Envoy Erik Solheim saw no new initiatives from either side (Ref C). According to the Norwegian Ambassador, the visit was intended more at maintaining the ceasefire, which the Norwegians see as increasingly under threat, than at jump-starting talks, which they view as a more remote prospect in the near term.

LTTE: "CLEANING HOUSE" IN THE EAST

14. (C) The Government's seeming lack of focus contrasts sharply with other players--most notably, the LTTE and the JVP (themselves former practitioners of the art of armed insurgency). The activities of both--targeted killings by the Tigers and Sinhala nationalist hardlining by the JVP--help contribute to a popular impression that the ceasefire is in peril. The LTTE continues to use the comparative quiet of the ceasefire to seal up the fissure in its once-monolithic facade wrought by the March defection of Karuna, its former Eastern military commander, by assassinating political opponents and Karuna supporters in the East and elsewhere.

15. (C) However short-lived Karuna's formal rebellion, his break with LTTE headquarters highlighted long-simmering frictions between northern "Jaffna" Tamils, who make up most of the Tiger leadership, and their poorer Eastern cousins, who comprise most of the front-line foot soldiers and, at least according to Karuna, absorbed many of the casualties in battle. Whether grounded in fact or not, the reports of such regional tensions clearly challenge the LTTE's long-standing claim to represent all Tamils and, thus, to an "Eelam" ("homeland") in both the north and east. The sensationalist (and likely unfounded) claim by anti-LTTE Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) leader and Government Minister Douglas Devananda to be assisting Karuna in launching a political party further antagonized the Tigers. Karuna's unprecedented desertion has rattled the LTTE leadership, which is now focused on reasserting unchallenged control of the East. As a result, the Tigers are replacing many of the eastern cadres (who have either deserted, died, or are now distrusted) with more reliable counterparts from the north. The influx of hard-core, well-armed cadres from the north, the remnants of pro-Karuna supporters still hiding in scattered outposts, the interference of the EPDP, and rumors of Sri Lankan Army complicity in aiding the Karuna faction have made the security situation in the ever-volatile East more fragile than ever. Residents and aid workers in Batticaloa report that stepped-up Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) checkpoints (which subject Tamils to greater scrutiny and more intensive searches) are exacerbating ethnic tensions and contributing to a feeling that the ceasefire is unraveling in the East.

16. (C) Absent other developments in the deadlocked peace process, the Tigers' repeated and flagrant violations of the Ceasefire Agreement--which add up to at least 37 assassinations since July--dominate the news. As long as the Tigers feel uncertain of their grip on the East--and thus the legitimacy of their claim to a Tamil Eelam--conventional wisdom holds that they are unlikely to resume negotiations. In the public perception, the Tigers are making all the gains in the East, while the GSL, along with the Nordic-sponsored Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and Norwegian facilitators, are doing nothing to rein them in. The Tigers have dismissed SLMM complaints on the killings by claiming that since most of the assassinations occurred in government-controlled territory, they are the responsibility (and hence the fault) of the GSL. The Sri Lankan Army, perhaps in an effort to avert such criticism, has complained to the SLMM that the Tigers are building new camps in the east in violation of the Ceasefire Agreement. (Note: According to SLMM Deputy Hagrup Hauckland, the camps are not new, and the Sri Lankan military knows it. He conceded, however, that Tiger positions in Trincomalee--presumably already in place at the time of the ceasefire--dominate strategic views of the harbor and give the GSL legitimate cause for concern. End note.) The LTTE, moreover, continues to delay SLMM-brokered meetings with Sri Lankan military authorities in the East to address these and other concerns.

JVP: RAISING THE FLAG AND
RAISING THEIR PROFILE IN THE EAST

17. (C) While the LTTE continues its mopping-up operations in the East, the JVP is trying to energize public opinion against talks on an interim administration for the north and east. In the absence of an active pro-peace (and pro-dialogue) campaign from the GSL, the JVP is using its formidable grass-roots organization to galvanize opposition to the LTTE's proposal and to press for a "de-merger" of the north and east. To this end, the one-time revolutionaries have now recast themselves as ardent patriots fighting against the proposed dismemberment of the Sri Lankan nation, and are attempting to expand their traditional base in the predominantly Sinhalese south to the more ethnically diverse west and east, particularly among the Muslim community. They are making some gains: the April election secured them an MP slot in the eastern district of Trincomalee and a seat for a female Muslim MP in the Western district of Gampaha.

18. (C) The JVP sees the East, with its Muslim majority, as particularly fertile ground for its "de-merger" message.

(The deeply splintered Muslim political leadership, which has now subdivided into at least four separate but equally impotent parties, has done little to oppose the JVP's inroads.) The Tigers' "concept of Eelam is finished now because of what is happening (as a result of Karuna's defection) in the East," JVP leader Somawansa Amarasinghe recently claimed to us. To capitalize on this, JVP members have started a community action organization called "Awakening in the East" to drum up support among Sinhalese and Muslim electorates for a "de-merger." Although "Awakening" can claim few adherents thus far, it may gain ground if the Sinhalese and Muslim populations in the East continue to feel overlooked by the GSL and their own political leadership. The party is also trying to tap into resentment within the Sinhalese community in the East. On September 9-10 the JVP led a two-day strike in Trincomalee to protest the August 18 abduction of two Sinhalese home guards by the Tigers. According to media reports and sources in the JVP, on September 12 the JVP MP from Trincomalee, learning that the LTTE had forbidden the Sri Lankan flag from being flown at an official ceremony to inaugurate a new district court building, crashed the program and raised the flag in defiance of the Tiger diktat. While what actually happened may differ somewhat from the media's account (the Secretary of Justice, for one, disputed the JVP's version of events to us), the incident attracted widespread and favorable mainstream coverage for the JVP. The intended message to the public is clear: only the JVP is brave enough to take on the Tigers in the East.

TIGERS SINCERE OR STONEWALLING?

19. (C) The Tigers' continued ceasefire violations and their refusal to be flexible on the agenda for negotiations raise questions about the sincerity of their claims to want a political resolution to the conflict. While their long-term objectives may be in doubt, however, it seems unlikely to us that the Tigers are contemplating a return to full-scale hostilities anytime soon. The loss of Karuna's cadres has undoubtedly depleted the LTTE's fighting force; the Tigers' continued recruitment of children may reflect an attempt to fill that gap. The LTTE, moreover, likely views their grip on the East as still too uncertain to risk reopening the conflict at this time. Instead, the Tigers will likely continue to exploit the ceasefire to serve their immediate goals: eliminating political opposition; re-establishing control in the East; developing parallel civil administrations in the north and east; amassing funds from "taxes" on roads and businesses that would close if the conflict resumed; gaining international goodwill (and donations from a sympathetic Tamil diaspora); and, most important, seeing how much the GSL will cede through negotiations. The GSL's internal disarray suits those purposes well, and the Tigers may be in no rush to change the dynamic--and give Kumaratunga's leadership a boost--either by agreeing to negotiations or by resuming the conflict.

WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

10. (C) While few doubt President Kumaratunga's personal commitment to achieving a negotiated resolution to the conflict, many doubt her ability to do so under current circumstances. Her well-known tendency to micro-manage the most important roles in the government--even if she has neither the time nor the expertise to execute them--combined with her equally well-known penchant for procrastination may be her greatest liabilities. Distrustful and wary of others, she has difficulty sharing information and delegating real responsibility to more capable technocrats, like Jayantha Dhanapala of the Peace Secretariat. As a result, those who should be working most closely with the President on the peace process, like Dhanapala, Foreign Minister Kadirgamar or even Prime Minister Rajapakse, often admit they are not privy to the President's thinking. With no one else really in charge of the peace process--and with the President herself preoccupied with maintaining the fragile coalition that keeps her in power--the GSL appears too distracted and too divided to develop a coherent strategy to revive negotiations. The vacuum has allowed the anti-peace lobby, fueled by Sinhala chauvinists like the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) and the JVP, to grow more vocal. With no public relations campaign to highlight the benefits of peace, the GSL has done little so far to repudiate those claims.

11. (C) The President must refocus her scattered attention on the peace process or risk ceding center stage to the Tigers, the JVP or Opposition. She can help rectify the deteriorating security situation in the East by instructing the Sri Lankan Army to step up patrols in government-controlled territory (and, perhaps, by ensuring the military has ceased support to the Karuna faction). As Peace Secretariat head Jayantha Dhanapala suggested, she could orchestrate a comprehensive public relations campaign

on the benefits of the peace process (Ref A). As Norwegian Special Envoy Solheim recommended, she could make a unilateral offer to consider the LTTE-proposed interim administration as a starting point for negotiations (Ref C). Such a position would pre-empt Tiger stonewalling on restarting dialogue while leaving open the possibility of considering other proposals on a "final arrangement," thereby neutralizing criticism from the JVP and other pro-nationalist groups. If the JVP and other coalition partners support the initiative, Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe has indicated the United National Party (UNP) would likely support it as well (Ref B).

12. (C) The lack of recent progress on the peace front is creating a public impression of GSL inertia and indecisiveness, and allowing less encouraging developments, like the violence in the East and the JVP's anti-negotiating stance, to dominate the landscape. The President must reclaim the initiative on the peace process and mobilize public support for negotiations. A unilateral move to reopen talks would put pressure on the Tigers to stop stonewalling and force the JVP to come clean on support for the peace process. Such a step is politically risky for the President, however, whose short-term interests rest on retaining the JVP as a coalition partner. Whether she decides to take the "bold step" recommended by the Norwegians (Ref C) or wait for greater clarity on the domestic political front, the appearance of GSL inaction has clearly become a liability.

WHAT THE U.S. CAN DO

13. (C) In the longer term, the U.S. can assist the GSL reinvigorate the peace process in a number of ways. Through diplomatic channels in Colombo and Washington, we can help galvanize international support for GSL efforts, encouraging the international community to speak with one voice in condemning Tiger terror. As suggested by Dhanapala, we can reach out to influential members of the Tamil diaspora in the U.S. for their help in prodding the Tigers back to the table (Ref A). Periodic public statements, like that issued by the Department on August 16, and high-level visits, like that of Counterterrorism Coordinator Ambassador Cofer Black (September 6-9), keep the pressure on the LTTE to renounce terrorism. We can redouble our ongoing efforts to emphasize, through a public relations campaign of our own, the "peace dividends" provided by increased foreign investment opportunities and by USAID programs specifically linked to the peace process. We should also continue to encourage the main Opposition UNP to play a responsible role and support the President's peace attempts.

14. (C) In the short term, the President must either co-opt the JVP into supporting her or move ahead without them. We can help by making clear to her that she will have U.S. support if she is willing to take chances for peace and that the U.S. remains committed to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. If the Secretary were to make this point when they meet at the UNGA, it could have tremendous impact.
LUNSTEAD